

Laurel Street Station (Fire Station No. 1)
1801 Laurel Street
Baton Rouge
East Baton Rouge Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1127

HABS
LA,
17-BATRO,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

LAUREL STREET STATION (Fire Station No. 1)

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Location: 1801 Laurel Street, northeast corner
18th street, Baton Rouge, Parish of
East Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

USGS Baton Rouge West Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates 15:675780: 3369 990.

Present Owner: City of Baton Rouge.

Present Use: Fire Station.

Significance: In the mid-1920s, the growing city of
Baton Rouge built and dedicated four
"modern picturesque engine houses"
designed to harmonize with residential
neighborhoods. Today, Fire Station No.
1 is the only one still serving in its
original capacity. The city is
planning to renovate this station,
which has operated efficiently for over
fifty years.

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: late 1924 - April 1925.
2. Architect: W.T. or T.T. Nolan. The State Times Advocate says "T" but the Parish Mortgage records say "W". Research did not clarify this discrepancy, or provide any more data on this architect from New Orleans.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of property: "Lots Nos. 4 and 5 of Square No. 25, each measuring 67 feet on Laurel Street by a depth of 128 feet between parallel lines."

Deed, March 29, 1917, Louis U. Babin to
City of Baton Rouge \$3000.

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4. Builder or contractor: Albert E. Tolle, Contractor of Hammond, Louisiana (Mortgage Record Book 121, page 6, August 12, 1924). For the Laurel Station and the St. Ferdinand Station, he was to be paid \$31,945.20, excluding plumbing and heating costs. The two stations were to include "Spanish tile roofs and copper metal work." (Tolle's grandson, an employee of the City of Baton Rouge, said that his grandfather was an established contractor in Baton Rouge and Hammond in the 1920s and 1930s.)
5. Original plans and construction: In 1922, the City of Baton Rouge passed a bond issue for \$175,000 for four new fire stations. Completed and dedicated in 1925, the Laurel Street Station (Fire Station Number 1) was described in the Local State Times (April 11, 1925, p. 9) as follows:

FIRE STATIONS NEARING COMPLETION;

BUILT FOR USE, BUT ARE ATTRACTIVE

The new sub-stations of the Baton Rouge fire department, located at the intersection of Laurel and Lewis streets, and at the intersection of St. Ferdinand and South Boulevard, which have been under construction for the past six months, are practically completed, according to Chief R.A. Bogan of the department, and with the large central fire station, located on Laurel, near Church street, will be ready for use about April 20.

Each of the new sub-stations, which are exactly alike, are attractive structures, built to resemble a residence more than a public building, to conform with their surroundings in the residential sections of the city. They are two-story stucco buildings,

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with a tendency toward the Italian in architecture with their heavy red tile roofs and olive green casement windows and doors. All exterior woodwork, as the long window boxes beneath the front windows, are olive green, and the large green doors, on either side, are the only indications that the buildings are to house fire trucks.

The first floor of each building is 46 feet in width by 62 feet in length. One enters the house proper from a front porch, whose arches are decorated with a touch of red brick. On opening the front door one is immediately in the living room of the firemen--a pleasant, cheery room of many windows. It, like the entire rest of the house, is finished in dull cream. To one's right rises the stairway. Straight in front of one is the door to the dining room, and there are also doors to the right and the back leading into each of the two large rooms which form an "L" around the house proper and in which the fire engines will be kept.

The dining room is attractively equipped with built-in table and seats, resembling the modern breakfast nook, but larger, for the firemen, and with built-in sink and kitchen cabinet and drawers. In the back of the room is installed the heating apparatus, which will furnish steam heat for the entire building.

The larger portion of the upstairs is one large, airy room which will be used as sleeping quarters for the firemen. To the right and toward the front is the locker room for the men, where 12 large lockers have already been built. Behind this are the wash rooms, which are equipped with two showers. There is also an upstairs porch.

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In addition to the steps, which are a round-about-way of reaching the ground floor when firemen are in a hurry, the building is provided with large brass slide poles which run from the sleeping quarters upstairs straight down to the rooms in which the engines and fire equipment will be kept.

Despite their residential appearance the buildings are designed primarily for firemen and fire equipment, as can be seen by the device which regulates the large green doors, which opens from each room where the engines will be kept to the street. These heavy doors fly open with a bang when a pulley which hangs from the ceiling is jerked, and they close automatically in a few minutes, just giving the engines time to rush out and not causing the firemen any delay to close and lock them when on their way to a fire.

Each of the new sub-stations cost approximately \$18,000. The contract with Albert Tolle, contractor of Hammond, who constructed, was for \$16,500 without lighting and plumbing. T.T. Nolan, New Orleans architect, drew the plans.

Plans for furnishing the building, putting them into use, will be taken up next week. Chief Bogan has called a meeting of all women in the vicinity of the Laurel and Lewis street station for Wednesday afternoon at 4:30 o'clock at the new station when they will discuss means of making the station more homelike for the six firemen who will soon live there.

6. Alterations and additions:

The brick sills and ornamentation have been painted. In the late 1960s, the brass slide poles were removed and a modern door was installed in the engine room. At the same time, the open space on the northeast side of the watch room was enclosed with a wall and a door because of the installation of air conditioning. In 1977-1978, a central air-conditioning unit was added.

B. Historic Events and Persons connected with the Building:

The oldest fire company in Baton Rouge dated from 1825. Eventually, six volunteer companies were established, between whom there was great rivalry. Membership in any of the companies was considered prestigious and, "Unless you or one of your family was a fire fighter, you just weren't in it." (Program, 3rd Annual Fireman's Festival May 15, 16, 1930. Unpaginated). Annually, on George Washington's birthday, there was a fireman's parade complete with floats and a Grand Ball.

In 1914, the fire companies were transferred to the public domain. By 1918, there were four paid employees. With the passage of a bond issue for \$175,000 in 1922, the streets were paved and four new fire stations were built. By 1925, the number of Fire Department employees had grown to 40.

While the Laurel Street Station has continued functioning as a fire station, the other three stations have been changed considerably. The Ferdinand station, designed by Nolan and almost identical to Fire Station No. 1, has been converted into a house. The South 15th Street Station is now leased to another city agency, and the Central Fire Station has been converted to a fire fighter's museum and offices for the Arts and Humanities Council.

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C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- a. City of Baton Rouge and Parish of East Baton Rouge Conveyance and Mortgage Records, Government Building, Centroplex, 222 St. Louis Street, Baton Rouge, La. 70821.
- b. Fire Department Program, Third Annual Fireman's Festival, May 15, 16, 1930.
- c. Interviews with Chief "Willie" Miller, August, 1978.
- d. Interview with Charles Tolle (grandson of contractor Albert E. Tolle), Employee, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Centroplex.

2. Secondary and published sources:

- a. State Times Advocate: April 11, 1925, January 1, 1926, June 15, 1937, March 17, 1952 (Special supplement D-8), and October 10, 1949.
- b. Chamber of Commerce Book on Baton Rouge (no date or publisher).

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character: This Mediterranean style fire station has four picturesquely composed elevations, varied fenestration, typical brackets, and red tile roofs.

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2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This two-story fire station measures 60'-8" (five-bay front) x 44'-8".
2. Foundation: Concrete.
3. Wall construction: Hollow clay tile, stuccoed painted off-white. The decorative wooden trim on the windows, doors, brackets, eaves and brick ornamentation is painted a medium brown. The porch is a light beige color.
4. Structural system: The bearing walls are made of structural clay tile, measuring 6" high x 9" wide x 4" thick with channels for adhesions of the plaster.
5. Porches: The front L-shaped porch (facing south and west) is reached by three concrete steps. The opening has a flat segmental arch with four corbels on each side. A similar elongated arch is on the west facade. The arched opening is flanked by two small rectangular openings. The arches, sills and geometric ornamentation on the fire station are painted brick. There is a porch above.
6. Chimneys: There is one chimney on the northwest slope of the roof. Made of stuccoed brick, it has battered sides and a horizontal band in the brick work.
7. Openings: Each elevation is different.
 - a. Doors: The principal door (south) leads from the porch into the fire station. This door, and all the others, have six small lights over two vertical panels. This is surmounted by a transom, which is painted over.

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The engine rooms are on the southeast and northwest. The front (southeast) engine room has a modern door. The northwest engine room has its original doors, which open inward. These doors have diagonal boards and windows with twelve lights of various sizes. Metal strap hinges are on the top and bottom of the doors. On the south side of the engine room bay there is another smaller door. The east elevation has two identical doors, both leading into the engine room.

- b. Windows: All casement windows, despite size differences, have the same basic design; they are recessed with transoms, moldings, and brick sills.

On the porch, flanking the front (south) door are three windows, two on the right and one on the left, with all of the panes painted over. On the second floor there are three windows, but one is closed up. Over the engine room in the front are two smaller windows and a window box.

The first floor of the west elevation has two window units, one containing an air-conditioner and the other, in the kitchen, containing three small double-casement windows. The second floor has four windows. The north elevation has four equally spaced windows on the ground floor.

The east elevation has five windows at the first level. The second floor of the east elevation has a row of three smaller double casement windows.

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8. Roof:

- a. Shape: The hipped roof is covered with red Spanish tiles. Shed roofs project out over the entrances to the engine room.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Of particular interest is the bracket and beam construction under the eaves. The rafters, made of cypress, have grooved ends that fit into horizontal members under the roof line. There are different types of brackets, one with a curved brace and the other more geometric. Six are found at the south elevation, five on the west, seven on the north and four on the east.

Each of the engine room bays has two brackets. At the apex of the roof on the east and west sides, there are louvered pediments with decorative knobs.

C. Description of interior:

1. Floor plan: The ground floor consists of the watch room, north of which is the kitchen. To the east of the watch room, two steps lead down to the front engine room. In the back of this engine room, there is a store room, on the left, and a toilet, on the right. Between these is an entrance to the rear engine room. This space originally contained the fireman's poles that connected the first and second stories. In the northeast wall of the watchroom there is a door, through which is a ramp, that leads down to the rear engine room.

Most of the second floor is used as a dormitory. A locker, in the southeast corner, and a lavatory in the northeast corner occupy the rest of the floor.

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The double-paneled-door to the northeast of the dormitory originally housed the fireman's poles, and now contains an air conditioner.

2. Stairways: There is one enclosed stairway in the southeast corner of the watch room. Originally it was an open stairwell; the base of the newel post is still visible in the watch room. The staircase rises two steps to the east, takes a 90° turn and then rises sixteen more steps, up to the dormitory. The balustrade and handrail are both plain.
3. Flooring: The watch room and kitchen floors have had linoleum installed over the concrete floors. The rest of the first floor is concrete. The second floor has 3" wide pine boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls on the ground floor are painted beige with brown trim. The upstairs is painted off-white. The concrete baseboards are also painted.
5. Openings: The doors have plain wooden molding, painted brown. The doors between the kitchen and the watch room and the watch room and the engine room (east) have five horizontal panels, as do the first floor store room and lavatory.
6. Special decorative features: There is plain molding between the various openings (doors and windows) which tends to tie the rooms together visually. The original lockers remain.

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7. Hardware: In the rear (northwest) engine room, the original door lock remains. The impression on the lock reads "Grether Automatic Door Springs, Grether Fire Equipment Company, Dayton, Ohio."

Prepared by Sibyl McCormac Groff
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer, 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was jointly sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the City of Baton Rouge, Parish of East Baton Rouge, Division of Community Development. Under the auspices of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS and Kenneth Anderson, Principal Architect, the project was completed in the summer of 1978 at the HABS field office, Department of Architecture, Louisiana State University. The team was comprised of Sibyl McCormac Groff (Columbia University), project supervisor and historian; Timothy Allanbrook (Rhode Island School of Design), project foreman; architect Kate Johns (Arizona State University); and student architects William J. Graham (University of Maryland), Robert P. Louton (University of Arkansas), and George W. Steinrock, Jr. (University of Detroit).

ADDENDUM TO
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